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# LOAN COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS OF MR. THOMAS B. CLARKE.

BY MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

SOME time ago the announcement was made that Mr. Thomas B. Clarke, of New York City, had offered a prize of \$300 for the best painting exhibited at the approaching exhibition of the National Academy of Design, and that he proposed to create a permanent fund for that purpose. This announcement was speedily followed by the exhibition of the private collection of Mr. Clarke, at the American Art Gallery, in the interest of the fund. So little preliminary movement was observed that the exhibition almost stole upon us unawares. But the undeniable interest it has aroused, and the gratification it has given, by no means rest on the pleasant sense of surprise.

The exhibition is unique among loan collections, since it is composed entirely of American pictures. It was not known before that New York possessed so intrepid a collector. But Mr. Clarke has the courage of youth. The exhibition also proves that he possesses taste and judgment. A more enjoyable exhibition and a more creditable one has seldom been seen here.

Almost all the paintings have been seen before. The mind running back over the last three or four exhibitions of the Academy of Design, will place most of the works, and remember them as the best things shown, and the first to receive the magical little ticket which so dignifies them in the eyes of the multitude. Who this prompt and discriminating purchaser was has never before appeared.

But this is an American collection in a sense deeper than that the paintings are by American artists. That may mean much or nothing. The principal works shown could by no possibility have been produced in other countries or by other men. The distinction we readily appreciate, since both Munich and Paris are from time to time domesticated with us under purely London signatures. But these works, at least that large number which give the seal to the exhibition, arise directly out of our own surroundings.

The American landscape presents as many difficulties to the painter as the American figure subject. If the bald unpicturesqueness of the native defies the painter of American *genre*, the difficulties of selection, the embarrassment of material, and lack of atmospheric charm, bewilder and perplex the landscape painter. It is but a decade since the landscape that best claimed attention must celebrate the wonders of the Sierras, the wild luxuriance of the Adirondacks, or the brilliance of our Autumn foliage.

And the fact that there were men who painted phases of nature such as Jervis McEnten and Homer Martin, does not obscure the other fact that the woods were full of artists trying to get on to their canvases all out of doors.

The reaction from this has been the domestication of the French landscape school, and with it the peculiar qualities of the French landscape. New Jersey, wrapped in the moist vapory softness of the Channel, presents a charming unreality, and Long Island streams with sedgy-willow bordered banks, are enchantingly similar to those of the Seine.

The canvases of the half dozen landscape artists in the Clarke collection have not been chosen as pleasant reminiscences. The most prominent of these is "The Winter Morning" of Mr. George Inness, which was in the Academy of Design two years ago. The details of the landscape are unpromising, as are found in these characteristic tracts which the hand of man has despoiled but not yet transformed. No American could mistake its native ugliness for that of any other land. The peculiar qualities of the atmosphere are as truly felt. The sharp, frosty chill of the air is that with which we are so familiar.

It is this incisiveness which makes American landscape painting so difficult an art. Mr. Inness has his material in his grasp, and his delicate blues and browns serve to enforce the reality of those atmospheric qualities, and to make them artistically agreeable.

If Mr. Francis Murphy be poetical and Mr. Thos. Allen plainly set down his facts, if Mr. Wyant

discover the melancholy twilight charm of an old stubble field, or Mr. Poor the bleakness of a hill-side in March, if Mr. Bolton Jones discover the blitheness of spring with the unchaining of the streams, and Mr. Lafarge a dream of beauty in a bit of old orchard, each mood of man or nature, both subject and treatment, belong to that art, which, if one hesitates to call American, may at least be termed native.

The figure subjects largely outnumber the landscapes. If the distinction holds good as to the landscapes, it is much more emphatic in the figures. Wherever the men learned their trades, they practise them here. Out of any conjectural category are the names of J. G. Brown

W. S. Smedley, Mr. Kapper, Mr. Ward, and Mr. Brush, nor of the young Morans.

With the exception of Mr. Eastman Johnson, the other men are, at least, liable to paint Brittany and Bavaria like Frenchmen and Germans. Instead Mr. Ulrich paints wood engravers, a carpenter, and glass blowers with a union of finish and breadth, a control of gradations of light, and a rendering of types that have made his work the event of recent exhibitions.

Mr. Edgar Ward has performed the same service for the worker in leather with greater realism and less finesse. Mr. Moeller's "Morning News" essays the same work in more elegant *genre* and is one of the clever pieces of the exhibition.

The details, the bric-a-brac, and the reflections of the rich appointments contribute to such a luxurious ensemble, and while claiming so much in themselves are yet subordinated to the figure of the gentleman with his newspaper, so evidently an American and one whose ease and comfort is worth the painter's skill. This is art, well balanced, easy, and natural, and on its own feet, so to say. Mr. Francis Miller's "Local Freight on a Caboose," is a bold attempt with an unpromising subject with most successful results.

Mr. Anschutz's "Nooning," a group of half-clad iron workers, is not so barren of picturesqueness, and he has found how fertile in artistic interest is the sunlight filtered through the smoke of Pittsburgh and playing on the naked bodies. There is a human quality also in the buoyancy of the men in their hour of freedom, which is worth remarking.

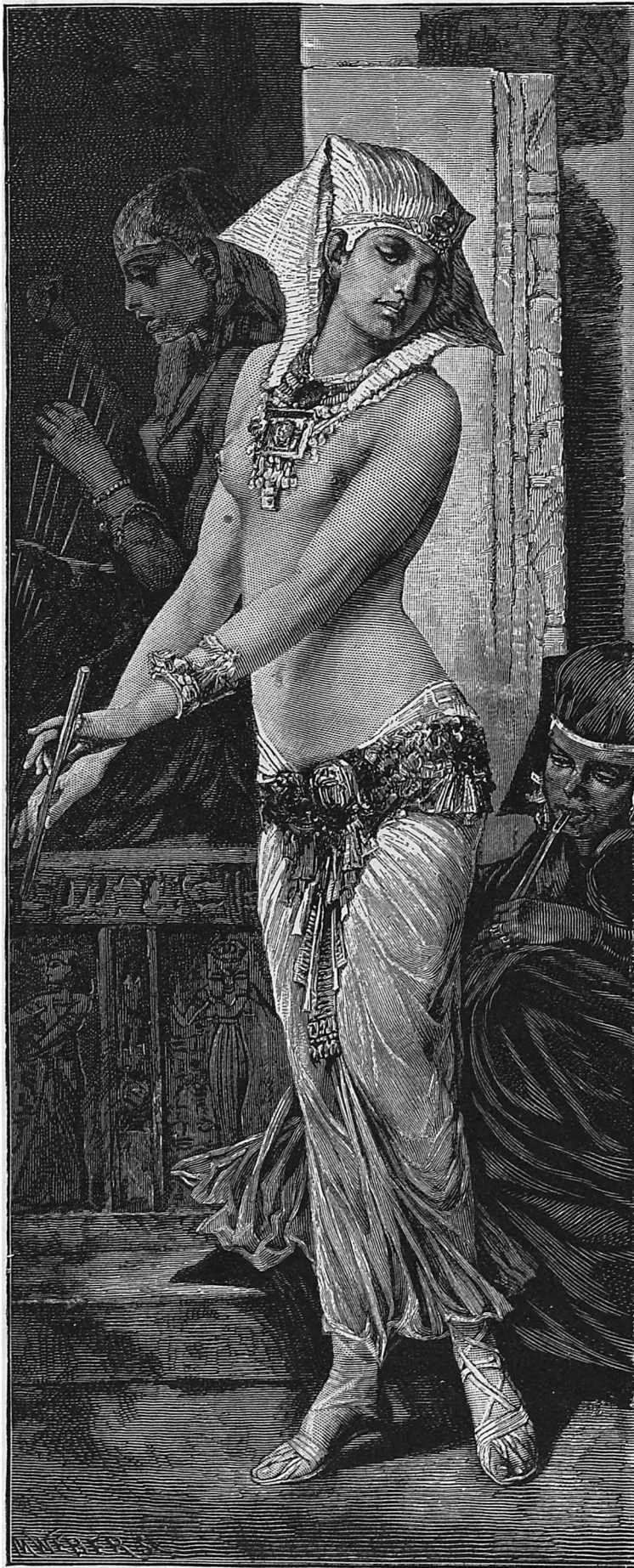
Mr. Hovenden's negro subjects Mr. Clarke has chosen in preference to his more elaborate ideal works, a preference in which most people will concur. The striking merits of Mr. Alfred Kapper's painting, "Is Life Worth Living," have been remarked before. "The New England Peddler" of Mr. Eastman Johnson is delightfully suave in touch, and the persuasive genial humor of the old man's face made perfectly apparent in the tips of the nose and chin, which alone are seen. Here also are two canvases from Mr. Smedley, "The Weekly Mail" and "Embarrassment," a work that has been spoken of before in these columns. Mr. Smedley not only paints native subjects, but unlike most of the men whose pictures are found here, has never studied, nor I believe even traveled abroad, and nothing is more pertinent at this moment than to note the steady growth of a man like Mr. Smedley, who in no way can depend on the stimulus of art atmosphere abroad and the impetus of foreign studios.

Mr. George Forest Brush, as Mr. Smedley, has received his art education in this country. His work "Mourning her Brave," just off his easel and in this exhibition, is on a distinctly higher plane than any of the works alluded to.

For several seasons Mr. Brush has given tentative sketches of Indian characteristics, but this is the first picture exhibited. A squaw stands by a precipice, behind her rises a steep slope of untrodden snow, and on a shelving rock lies the covered body of the brave about which the vultures swoop. The head of the woman is thrown back, and her parted lips show that she is chanting her grief. The teeth of the wind is felt in the almost sculpturesque folds of her mantle. There is something statuesque in the figure of the woman, but it is the statuesqueness of the West, not of the East. It is not Greek, but Indian, that is to say, it comes from the study of nature, not from antique and filtered through the inner consciousness. Her feet are planted together, her arm falls in a straight line. The composition is well thought out, the structural feeling of the

cliff, the broken line of its edge. All this is worth remarking, but in addition, and more than all, is the human cry which, whether of widowed queen or squaw, makes all the world akin.

The exhibition is full of suggestion. The chief impression it leaves is compared with those of other nations. American artists are conscientious rather than ambitious. The works are all most modest in size, and remembering that Mr. Clarke has bought for the most part the best works out of the exhibitions, the dimensions of the canvases cannot be said to have depended on the depth of Mr. Clarke's purse, but rather by the ability and inclination of each individual painter.



PANEL. EGYPTIAN DANCING GIRL.

and E. L. Henry. Mr. Clarke is the owner of Mr. J. G. Brown's "Old Fiddler," which, as somebody said, ought to be overlaid with gold dollars; Mr. S. J. Guy's "Bed Time Stories," one of the best things he has ever done; and "Waiting for an Answer," by E. L. Henry, pertinent as to the subject and of unusual breadth of touch. With these may also be numbered A. C. Howland's "Pot Boiler," Wordsworth Thompson's "Old Stone Church, Sleepy Hollow," and "Every Man His Own Doctor," by T. W. Wood.

But these works enrolled, as it were, are not significant as are those of Eastman Johnson, Mr. Hovenden, Mr. Ulrich, Mr. Louis Moeller, Mr.